Chapter 3
GPS Applications in USACE

3-1. General

Currently, surveyors use GPS to increase their efficiency, productivity, and to produce more accurate results. GPS can be used for real estate surveys, regulatory enforcement actions, horizontal and vertical control densification, structural deformation studies, airborne photogrammetry, dynamic positioning and navigation for hydrographic survey vessels and dredges, hydraulic study/survey location, river/floodplain cross-section location, core drilling location, environmental studies, levee overbank surveys, and levee profiling. Future construction uses of dynamic GPS are unlimited: levee grading and revetment placement, disposal area construction, grade control, etc. Additionally, GPS has application in developing various levels of GIS spatial data. A few of these applications are briefly described in this chapter.

3-2. Project Control Densification

Establishing or densifying project control with GPS is often cost-effective, faster, more accurate, and more reliable than conventional survey methods. The quality control statistics and large number of redundant measurements in GPS networks help to ensure reliable results. Field operations to perform a GPS survey are relatively easy and can generally be performed by one person per receiver. GPS is particularly attractive for control networks as compared with conventional surveys because intervisibility is not required between adjacent stations.

3-3. Geodetic Control Densification

GPS can be used for wide-area high-order geodetic control densification. GPS provides very precise point positioning (when used in a relative mode), producing baseline results on the order of 5 to 10 ppm under average conditions.

3-4. Vertical Control Densification

GPS uses the World Geodetic System of 1984 (WGS 84) ellipsoid as the optimal mathematical model describing the shape of the earth on an ellipsoid of rotation. There is no direct mathematical relation between heights obtained from GPS and orthometric elevations obtained from conventional spirit leveling. However, a model can be determined from benchmark data and corresponding GPS data. This model can then be used to derive the unknown orthometric heights of stations occupied during a GPS observation period to densify supplemental small-scale topographic mapping. Geoid modeling software also exists and is used to determine orthometric heights from GPS. Extreme caution should be taken in using GPS for vertical densification. The procedures for vertical densification are described in further detail in Chapter 6.

3-5. Structural Deformation Studies

GPS survey techniques can be used to monitor the motion of points on a structure relative to stable monuments. This can be done with an array of antennae positioned at selected points on the structure and on remote stable monuments. Baselines are formulated between the occupied points to monitor differential movement. The relative precision of the measurements is on the order of ±5 mm over distances averaging between 5 and 10 km. Measurements can be made on a continuous basis. A GPS structural deformation system can operate unattended and is relatively easily installed and maintained.

3-6. Photogrammetry

The use of an airborne GPS receiver employing on-the-fly (OTF) techniques combined with specialized photogrammetric procedures has the potential to significantly reduce the amount of ground control for typical photogrammetric projects. Currently, these projects require a significant amount of manpower and monetary resources for the establishment of the control points. Therefore, the use of this GPS Controlled Photogrammetry (GCP) technology in the USACE civil works programs should reduce the production costs associated with large scale maps. The benefits of GCP will be realized in the savings estimation based on the premise that most of the USACE photogrammetry activities require USACE personnel to do much planning and surveying in preparation for the actual photogrammetry flight, and the GCP procedure has the potential for the reduction, or even elimination, of this surveying activity. Tests have shown that ground control coordinates can be developed from an airborne platform using adapted GPS kinematic techniques to centimeter-level precision in all three axes if system-related errors are minimized and care is taken in conduct of the GPS and photogrammetric portions of the procedures. High quality photogrammetric results can also be achieved with DGPS based on carrier-smoothed code phase positioning.

3-7. Dynamic Positioning and Navigation

Dynamic, real-time GPS code and carrier phase positioning of construction and surveying platforms has the potential for revolutionizing many current USACE design and construction functions. This includes dredge control systems, site investigation studies/surveys, horizontal and vertical construction placement, hydraulic studies, or any other activity requiring dimensional control. Real-time, centimeter-level 3D (based on the WGS 84 Ellipsoid) control may be achieved using carrier phase differential GPS; this method can be used for any type of construction or survey platform (e.g., dredges, graders, survey vessels, etc.). This method is discussed further in Chapter 6.

3-8. GIS Integration

A GIS is an effective means to correlate and store diverse information on natural or man-made characteristics of geographic positions. In order for a GIS to be reliably oriented, it should be based on a coordinate system. A standardized GIS network enables a more accurate exchange of GIS information between databases. In recent years, GPS has demonstrated its efficiency, cost effectiveness, and accuracy in precise surveying and mapping support.